



The League of Women Voters of Oregon, established in 1920, is a grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

March 5, 2025

To: [Sen. Lew Frederick](#) and [Rep. Emerson Levy](#), Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means [Subcommittee on Natural Resources](#)

Re: [HB 5026](#) – Oregon Parks and Recreation Dept. (OPRD) Budget – **SUPPORT with Comments**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon considered our Oregon State Parks such an important part of the state’s responsibilities that, in 1999, the League adopted a comprehensive position on parks, recognizing “*that a parks system is an appropriate function of state government*” and should “*Acquire, protect and preserve natural, scenic, cultural, historic and wildlife sites and other resources.*” We called for a periodically updated long-range strategic plan, giving high priority to “*Preservation and maintenance of existing parks; Protection and expansion of public access to ocean beaches; Acquisition of additional park resources; Provision of campground facilities and day-use areas; and Protection of scenic waterways.*”

The Oregon Parks and Recreation system is a crown jewel of Oregon’s state government. Oregonians treasure their varied natural landscape across all corners of our state. Our parks system assures our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy them as well. **Like in 1997, Oregon State Parks is again at a crisis.** After Measure 66’s vote to “save” our state parks with a portion of lottery dollars, Measure 76 passed to make that funding permanent. But Measure 76 had a “trigger”, put in to assure that monies would go out to parks programs around the state and limit agency spending. It has now come to fruition. Who knew that our lottery revenue would grow so much? And yet not enough for OPRD to absorb such a decrease in their operating dollars with the increase in salaries and services and other expenses (like that toilet paper you heard about!). The League raised the alarm in 2023 and we were appreciative that the Governor recognized this issue and provided help to bridge this funding issue for the current 2023-25 biennium, but we need to address the agency’s needs long term. **Over time new programs have been added and expenses have increased.** The legislature has created a number of free access programs for special user groups which reduces their fee revenue. The State Capitol State Park was added. Agencies supported grounds keeping on the Capitol Mall with an assessment in the past, but the practice was discontinued when parts of the property were transferred to Oregon Parks and Recreation Department management without funding more than 10 years ago.

When a bill passed in 2013 to redistribute RV registration fees between the state and counties, there was a discussion regarding possible agreements related to efficiency of management and not just trading parks properties. Although we understand there were to be “regional recreation coalitions”, it is unclear that the shared operational functions, marketing or management of properties promise has been met. We are encouraged to hear that such discussions and reviews of other contract obligations will be part of the work of management in the near future.

In 2017, the legislature added the Office of Outdoor Recreation—another new program and FTE. At the time, it was funded with General Funds. This position, as we understood, was to engage state recreation businesses in how they might add value to our state parks system and to tourism. Our other natural resource agencies may be engaged in this Office as well. **The League supports multiagency work on issues and outdoor recreation is certainly one of them.**

But the funding should have continued to be General Funds and not take more lottery dollars from the parks budget as is the case again in the Governor's budget for 2025-27.

In 2019 we saw three main challenges facing the Oregon state park system: The **age** of many facilities, increasingly **year-round demand** for service without a corresponding increase in operating resources and the increasing effects of **climate change** on our parks properties. The bonds in 2021 have started to address the first issue. Then Covid hit and everything shut down—both lottery revenue and park fee revenue took a dive. Of course, as people were ready to get back outside, they came back in droves! You have heard stories about the overcrowding and the need for sewer, water and road maintenance, as well as addressing damaging weather incidents. Oregonians—and others—are loving our parks to death! Well, at least to the point where the system needs upgrades that would cost more than the money available.

We believe that it is appropriate for the agency to **consider demographic and activity changes** when planning for the future. **You watched a video** of how OPRD continues to evolve. But this means yet **additional agency support is needed** if we want to invest in these efforts.

We were supportive of the \$50 million in lottery bonds provided in 2021 to address the backlog of maintenance issues, but bonds come with debt service costs which need to be paid. And the maintenance just keeps growing as some of our parks' infrastructure needs repair or replacement—at significant cost. It was concerning that the need has increased to \$300 million! Lack of water in some parks may be an issue as well as the need to upgrade septic systems as you saw from the list of projects.

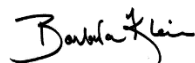
The effects of climate change on our parks' properties, particularly along the coast must be addressed before they become unusable. We know that erosion of our beaches and shorelines is increasing. The public's safety must be considered. **We owe it to the next generations to take care of our state treasures.**

The League appreciates the committee's comments and concerns related to the fee increases. Although we recognize the need to find funding, we worry that these increases will reduce the ability of some Oregonians to enjoy their state parks. A \$10 day pass could be one cost too much - considering that, for the most part, people will also need to pay for gas to get there. When we talk about equity, pricing needs to be factored in.

We note that there are **limited dollars set aside under this budget for acquisition of new properties.** Like any real estate deal, the agency needs to have the ability to take advantage of a purchase opportunity when an important property becomes available. So having the funding flexibility to be able to acquire a new property is important. Acquisition funds allow the Department to protect iconic sites in Oregon by purchasing the property, protecting the natural and historic resources plus allowing Oregonians to enjoy the site. Additionally, **acquisition funds allow for select purchases to expand current park properties to allow a larger number of Oregonians to enjoy a popular site.** We are encouraged by past legislative action when additional monies were needed to close a deal. We hope that precedent continues.

League members, like all Oregonians, treasure our Oregon Parks. We hope to work with you and others to continue to keep it one of Oregon's gems. We look forward to interim conversations around funding solutions and the Secretary of State's audit that might also help point out ways to protect our parks. **We ask that you support the funding, including continuing to upgrade the reservation system (POP 103) and consider our comments as you work this budget.**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



Barbara Klein
Acting LWVOR President



Peggy Lynch
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cc: [Lisa Sumption](#), Director, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department